

Sunday 28 March 2021 – Heather Wilson

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Prayer

Lord, we seek to recognise your presence, knowing that you are always with us. When we consider your great sacrifice and the degradation you suffered as the beautiful, incarnate One, we are overwhelmed by your love outpoured. Open our eyes to the extreme cost of your surrender, so that we might hold tight to the hand of promise today. **Amen.**

Hymn: Singing the Faith, 273, [here hangs a man discarded](#)

Here hangs a man discarded,
a scarecrow hoisted high,
a nonsense pointing nowhere
to all who hurry by.

Can such a clown of sorrows
still bring a useful word,
when faith and love seem phantoms
and every hope absurd?

Yet here is help and comfort
for lives by comfort bound,
when drums of dazzling progress
give strangely hollow sound:

Life, emptied of all meaning,
drained out in bleak distress,
can share in broken silence
our deepest emptiness:

And love that freely entered
the pit of life's despair,
can name our hidden darkness
and suffer with us there.

Christ, in our darkness risen,
help all who long for light
to hold the hand of promise
till faith receives its sight.

Brian Wren (b. 1936)

Let us pray together

I thank you Jesus for freely entering the pit of life's despair. It is a reminder to me that you suffered and can understand when I am hurting. My darkness was once your darkness so my hope for light is found in you. I hold on in the darkness to your hand of promise and remember that you are with me. **Amen.**

Today's Reading from the Old Testament: [Isaiah 53:1-12](#)

Today's Gospel Reading: [Mark 15:1-39](#)

Time to Reflect

This passage in Mark's Gospel begins with one Roman Officer asking Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Yet it ends with another Roman officer declaring, "This man truly was the Son of God!" Sandwiched between is Pilate's reluctance to give in to the leading priests' accusations. Pilate still wanting to release this 'King of the Jews' but the leading priests who Mark said 'had arrested Jesus out of envy,' stirred up the crowd so that they shouted all the more, 'Crucify him!' As we read Mark's account, we are taken with the injustice of it all. In exchange for a good man was the release of a revolutionary murderer who Mark names, Barabbas. It is not lost on us that the meaning of *Barabbas* is *Son of the Father*. As one *Son of the Father* is released, another *Son of the Father* is crucified.

By all accounts, this is not a *fair trade*. I am reminded of the song by Hillsong, "A Beautiful Exchange." In the lyrics are the words, '(Jesus) "you gave your life in a beautiful exchange." Of course, Mark's Gospel portrays Jesus' betrayal, arrest, trial, and crucifixion as anything but beautiful.

We see the same lack of beauty in Chapter 53 of Isaiah. In verse 2, we read "There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him." Yet in the very ugliness and scandal of the cross, Jesus gave us the most beautiful gift of all. He bore our sins so that we might be counted righteous. This is the beautiful exchange. We give him our filthy rags, and he clothes us with beauty and wonder. Do you wonder what Jesus thinks about the cruelty of the cross now?

Holy Week is a time to reflect not only on the cruelty of the cross but the beauty too. I am back to where we started that by all accounts this was not a *fair trade*. Yet, for you and me, it is a beautiful exchange. Perhaps, Jesus believes it to be so! Jesus said to his disciples, "You will weep and mourn over what is going to happen to me, but the world will rejoice. You will grieve, but your grief will suddenly turn to wonderful joy" (John 16:20).

What do you think is the beauty of the cross? I think the beauty of the cross is found in the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ, His Son. I believe the beauty of the cross is Jesus. Are you like the first Roman Officer (Pilate) still asking if Jesus is really the King of the Jews? Or are your exclamations more like the other Roman officer, "This man truly was the Son of God."

Let us pray

Jesus, you undertook unbearable suffering so that we might have our sins forgiven and receive an eternal home in heaven. No matter what we go through in this world, it will never compare to the glory that we have received in knowing you. We thank you for that beautiful exchange where you gave up your life so that we might receive abundant life. You endured the darkness so that we might receive everlasting light. You took on our sins so that we might take up your righteousness. **Amen.**

Take a time to sit quietly

A time of prayer

We pray for this world. We are conscious it is not our final home. Yet, we know you care for your creation – for all that you have made. For those who suffer and feel abandoned, we recall your words, “My God, My God, Why have you abandoned me?”

We pray for ourselves and the times we have turned our back on the One who loves us. When we have pointed an accusatory finger or looked away. We remember the words from Isaiah, “We turned our backs on him and looked the other way.” Wherever there is injustice in the world, we ask for the courage not to turn away but to stand up for the rights of others.

We pray for those who have lost loved ones during this pandemic. We remember friends and family members who are unwell, whether due to covid-19, cancer, or some other debilitating disease. We recall the words of the prophet Isaiah, “He was despised, and we did not care.” Forgive us when we do not care.

We thank you God that you hear and answer our prayers. We finish with the **Lord’s Prayer**.

Hymn: Listen to Hillsong, [“A Beautiful Exchange.”](#)

A prayer of blessing

To you who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, may God give you grace and peace (1 Thessalonians 1:1c).

Original Materials by Heather Wilson

All

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We are grateful to all the Ministers and Local Preachers from around the Connexion who have contributed to Worship at Home. This resource is administrated by Ministries: Vocations and Worship in the Connexional Team. We aim to continue to provide these resources until the end of August 2021.